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United Nations

Report of the International Civil Service Commission for 2011

Addendum

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Sixty-sixth Session
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Letter of transmittal

[10 April 2012]

Sir,

I have the honour to transmit herewith an addendum to the thirty-seventh annual report of the International Civil Service Commission.

The present addendum to the annual report of the International Civil Service Commission for 2011 responds to an urgent and immediate request from organizations of the common system, in particular from the Department of Field Support of the United Nations Secretariat, requesting the Commission to reconsider the rest and recuperation framework proposed in the Commission's annual report for 2011 and approved by the General Assembly in section C of its resolution 66/235. The present addendum takes into account new information obtained from the Department of Safety and Security and from the organizations that had not been available when the Assembly reached its conclusion on the matter in December 2011.

I should be grateful if you would submit this report to the General Assembly and, as provided in article 17 of the statute, also transmit it to the governing organs of the other organizations participating in the work of the Commission, through their executive heads, and to staff representatives.

(*Signed*) Kingston P. **Rhodes**
Chairman

His Excellency
Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York

Chapter I
Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 66/235, approved a new rest and recuperation framework characterized by an automatic link to the newly established danger pay. Following the recommendation of the Department of Safety and Security of the Secretariat on the danger pay locations late in February 2012, the organizations of the common system realized that administratively it would be very difficult and very costly to grant four-week cycles of rest and recuperation to all danger pay locations. The organizations brought up the issue at the seventy-fourth session of the Commission. On the basis of information received from the Secretariat, the Commission decided to request the Assembly to consider a revision of the rest and recuperation framework on an urgent and immediate basis.

Chapter II

Conditions of service in the field: harmonization of the conditions of service for staff serving in field duty stations in the common system

A. Revision of the rest and recuperation framework: background

2. In 2010, the General Assembly, in its resolution 65/248, approved the main elements of the rest and recuperation framework as proposed by the International Civil Service Commission. The Assembly also decided that the Commission should regulate the framework, effectively ensuring that all organizations of the United Nations common system adopt its elements as approved. In its annual report for 2011 (A/66/30, para. 238 (b)), the Commission recommended to the Assembly that the period of authorized absence on rest and recuperation be amended from five consecutive working days to five consecutive calendar days.

3. The main elements of the rest and recuperation framework are as follows:

(a) Five consecutive calendar days of time off, not charged to annual leave;

(b) Travel time between the place of duty and the authorized place of rest and recuperation;

(c) Paid travel by the most direct route and the most economical means from the place of duty to the authorized place of rest and recuperation.

B. Establishment of a four-week cycle

4. At its seventy-third session, the Commission considered the details of the operation of the rest and recuperation framework as applied by the organizations under the auspices of the Standing Committee on Field Duty Stations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Human Resources Network.

5. The Commission noted the administrative instruction on rest and recuperation (ST/AI/2011/7 and Amend.1) issued by the Secretariat, in which the framework reflects a cycle of four to six weeks as an exceptional and temporary measure for non-family duty stations with active conflict where United Nations premises and/or staff are clearly targeted and where staff work in very insecure conditions owing to their association with or employment by a United Nations common system organization. The cycle was designed in recognition of a select number of duty stations in which staff are exposed to extremely stressful living and working conditions in isolated and dangerous locations, including those for which a four-week cycle is considered necessary to allow staff to reduce their stress levels and maintain their mental health and well-being.

6. The United Nations adopted the cycle of four to six weeks to have a legal framework in which a four-week cycle could be granted to a restricted number of duty stations with active conflict and extremely stressful, difficult and isolated living and working conditions. A six-week cycle would cover other duty stations with active conflict but relatively less extreme conditions. Similarly, the Standing

Committee on Field Duty Stations applied a four-week rest and recuperation cycle for such exceptional situations.

7. The Commission decided to establish a four-week cycle separate from the six-week cycle, the former to be applied to duty stations approved for danger pay. When the framework was being developed, the duty stations that would be approved for danger pay, which was to come into effect on 1 January 2012,[1] were unknown. Furthermore, given its strict definition, the Commission expected that danger pay would be applied to a very limited number of locations. In that context, it was not possible at the time to accurately assess the potential operational implications and impact on programme delivery of linking a four-week rest and recuperation cycle to locations approved for danger pay.

8. In December 2011, the General Assembly, in its resolution 66/235, approved the Commission's revised set of criteria for granting rest and recuperation travel and the corresponding frequency of travel, including the link established between the four-week cycle of rest and recuperation and danger pay.

9. As from 1 April 2012, danger pay has been implemented and organizations of the United Nations common system would have to grant a four-week rest and recuperation cycle automatically to staff in duty stations where danger pay applies. While the locations approved for danger pay do merit payment of the allowance based solely on security criteria, not all danger pay locations require a four-week rest and recuperation cycle to provide proper relief to staff.

10. Rest and recuperation is critical for ensuring staff productivity and well-being in difficult and stressful duty stations. The frequency of travel on rest and recuperation needs, however, to be responsive not only to the levels of stress and isolation and to the difficulty of the conditions but also to the organizations' ability to effectively carry out their work. In order to manage the implementation of an automatic four-week rest and recuperation cycle at duty stations approved for danger pay, organizations would need to either increase staffing levels to make up for absences or reduce operations and operating budgets to enable payment of more frequent travel. Both of those measures would be unintended consequences not desired by the Commission.

11. According to the organizations, the automatic triggering of a four-week rest and recuperation cycle in all duty stations now approved for danger pay presents serious operational implications for field organizations and may have an adverse impact on effective programme delivery. At any given time, about 25 per cent of staff at those duty stations would be absent on rest and recuperation breaks. This would be compounded by the high vacancy rates in the most difficult duty stations approved for danger pay. At the request of the United Nations and field-based organizations, the Commission decided to delay the implementation of the rest and recuperation framework until 1 July 2012 and is submitting a revised framework to the General Assembly at its resumed sixty-sixth session.

[1] The Commission subsequently agreed to postpone the implementation of danger pay to 1 April 2012 owing to the delayed recommendation of locations from the Department of Safety and Security.

C. Action to be taken by the General Assembly

12. The General Assembly is requested to consider approving the revised set of criteria for granting rest and recuperation travel and the corresponding frequency of travel shown in the annex, with an effective date of 1 July 2012.

Annex

Proposed rest and recuperation framework

Frequency	*Conditions*
6 weeks[a]	Extreme situations as follows: • Very dangerous locations where staff are directly targeted as a result of their association with the United Nations or where premises are targeted, causing imminent threat to staff • Locations where there is war or active armed conflict and where staff are at high risk of becoming collateral damage
8 weeks	All non-family/restricted duty stations: • All duty stations declared by the Department of Safety and Security as restricted for all eligible dependants for security reasons • All duty stations designated as "non-family" by the Chair of the International Civil Service Commission
12 weeks	Duty stations with a high level of hardship: • Non-capital duty stations with a hardship classification of D or E • Exceptional cases of category E capital cities

[a] For very exceptional cases, a four-week rest and recuperation cycle can be approved by the Chair of the International Civil Service Commission, under delegated authority from the Commission, upon the recommendation of the Human Resources Network of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination.

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